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Bill to support dual language education passes Legislature

AUSTIN - SB 159/HB 218, which help maintain and expand cutting-edge dual-language education in schools across the state, including programs in the El Paso Independent School District, has passed the Texas Legislature.

The Texas Education Agency had interpreted requirements for teachers in such a way as to cast into doubt the continuation of successful programs in El Paso and elsewhere in the state. The bills, by state Sen. José Rodríguez and state Rep. Marisa Marquez, clarify the rules to allow continuation and expansion of the programs.

"This is good news for our very important language education programs, which EPISD has been a leader in and which are expanding across the state," Rodríguez said. "We look forward to the governor signing this common sense legislation into law."

Marquez said: "I am very proud that Senator Rodriguez and I were able to pass this piece of legislation to address the concerns of school districts across the state to provide them with the necessary tools to implement effective and successful bilingual education programs."

Background:

Dual language programs, used in more than 800 Texas schools, typically immerse students in instruction that is half in one language and half in the other. In the type of dual language programs prevalent at the El Paso Independent School District and many others around the state, the teacher of the English-language component of the program is certified in English as a Second Language (ESL) but typically not certified in Bilingual Education.

National experts, as well as experts at UTEP, who are leaders in dual language education believe a bilingual certified teacher in the Spanish-language portion of the program and a teacher with an ESL certification for the English-language component is the best combination for delivering a Dual Language Program.

However, due to a recent rule interpretation by the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC), when two parts of the Education Code were combined several years ago, teachers in the English-language component of the dual-language program are now required to be bilingually certified. This requires El Paso ISD and other school districts across the state to apply for an exception every year.

S.B. 159 would remove this unnecessary barrier and expand effective Dual Language programs throughout the state, which will benefit thousands of students and hundreds of teachers.

The Texas Association for Bilingual Education states that dual language is the most successful program in bilingual education in Texas.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.